A social justice perspective on women in educational leadership

Chapter 2: A Social Justice Perspective on Women in Educational Leadership

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Abstract

Social justice is fundamental to feminism. Feminist theorists place women's experiences of gender inequalities at the centre of their theorizations about leadership. Feminist critiques of leadership are set in a wider social context. In this chapter, the perspectives of women educational leaders are explored within the wider 'social justice leadership' perspective. Internationally, social justice leadership represents a major theme within policy, research and literature with a resurgence of interest into the experiences and perceptions of women in educational leadership. This chapter critically appraises women's perspectives on educational leadership, by drawing on the experiences of four women headteachers/principals in each of four international contexts, sixteen women in total. Case studies, conducted in Scotland, England, Jamaica and New Zealand, provide contrasting, cross-national contexts to compare the influences, possibilities and challenges that women school leaders experience. Each of the country researcher teams was guided by the same interview questions, adopting a common methodological approach for conducting in-depth interviews and the analysis of findings.

Key Words

Women leaders, social justice, educational leadership

Introduction

Internationally, social justice represents a major theme within the areas of leadership policy, research and literature. Related to this, there has been a resurgence of interest into the experiences and perceptions of women in educational leadership (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011; McNamara, Howson, Gunter and Fryers, 2008; Reynolds, 2002). Internationally, women are under-represented in school leadership and continue to face challenges that are both complex and not altogether understood. This underrepresentation of women in school leadership represents a key issue in unlocking leadership and management potential, as well as establishing equality with men. However, within the context of this broader policy environment, limited comparative empirical evidence is available on women in school leadership. Blackmore (2009a: 80) suggests *'research is needed to further explore the significance of the relations between context and leadership practice in order to comprehend how context shapes the practice of leadership'.*

What Does the Literature Say About Women in Educational Leadership with a Social Justice Perspective?

Research literature on women and educational leadership continues to direct scholarly attention to women's overrepresentation in the teaching population and underrepresentation in headship positions (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011; Fuller, 2013). Much of this literature serves to remind us of the ever-present barriers,

contradictions and achievements associated with women leading in education.

Women And Leadership

Research illustrates significant factors that impact on women's representation and leadership practice (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011) and barriers to women's advancement (Coleman, 2001). Despite the legitimacy of gender equity within official government discourse, institutionalized formations of bureaucracies informed by neoliberal political theories premised upon individual merit (Blackmore, 2010), reproduce hierarchical structures. Such structures propel male leaders into senior positions (Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan and Ballenger 2007), exclude many women from educational leadership opportunities, thus creating social injustice. Women's representation in leadership is a matter of social justice and *'we must never lose sight of the facts that the leaders we are discussing are women, that doing leadership may differ for women and men, and that leadership does not take place in a genderless vacuum'* (Yoder, 2001: 815).

What Is 'Social Justice'?

As a concept, social justice is *'inherently problematic'* with usage of the term reflecting a '*broad range of philosophical and political traditions'* (Barnett and Stevenson, 2015: 520). Constructions of social justice are *'highly dependent on the context in which it is used'* (Gairín and Rodriguez-Gómez, 2014: 820), with perspectives '*inextricably linked to social contexts within which models of justice make sense to the people involved'* (Harris, 2014: 98). Attempts to define social justice are problematic since *'in pluralistic societies people understand it differently'* (Taysum and Gunter, 2008: 184). Thus, *'social justice has diverse, complex and*

dynamic meanings' (Davis, Hill, Tisdall, Cairns and McCausland, 2014: 7). Moreover, conceptions of social justice *'are not fixed, stable or uncontested across time, place and political context'* (Hajisoteriou and Angelides, 2014: 897).

Blackmore (2009b: 7) calls for *'greater conceptual clarification'* of social justice, recognising that its current use includes terms such as equity, (in)equality, equal opportunity, affirmative action and diversity, each taking on different meanings dependent on national context. While social justice may well be *'an irreducibly complex concept'* (Griffiths, 2014: 234), Shields and Mohan (2008: 291) provide a helpful frame through which this chapter explores a social justice perspective on women in educational leadership:

> *Our concept of social justice is one that identifies issues of power and inequity in schools and society and that challenges personal and systemic abuses of power as well as alienating and marginalizing beliefs, values, and practices*.

How Does Social Justice Relate To Educational Leadership And Management?

Within the field of educational administration, leadership and management interest in *'issues of marginalization'* is relatively recent (Ryan, 2010: 358-9), with research mostly focused on the role of the school administrator and on principal preparation programmes (Insana, Mardones, Welsh and Johnston-Parsons, 2014).

Mullen (2008) considers democracy and accountability, power and authority, equity and opportunity as critical issues of social justice that are central to educational leadership. Richardson and Sauers (2014: 107) contend that social justice within schools begins with leaders since *'leaders recognize that inequalities exist within the*

system and focus their energies to ensure equity for all students'. Similarly, Bogotch and Shields (2014: 10) believe that *'educational leadership and social justice are, and must be, inextricably interconnected'*. Indeed, Bogotch (2008: 94) perceives the onus for education as *'seeking a pedagogy and leadership that might guide us towards change and social justice'*, coming to perceive social justice as *'a moral responsibility in terms of how educational leaders used their power'* (Bogotch, 2014: 54). In discussing social justice as an educational leadership construct, Bogotch (2014: 52-53) asks, *'Why insert educational leadership?'* concluding that:

> *...the relationship between educational leadership and others is reciprocal, translating the lessons of power so as to create opportunities for others to better their lives. ... the legitimacy of social justice as an educational construct lies in making tangible differences in other people's lives, not in how we, as educators, practice education, good, bad, or indifferently.*

Thus, social justice leadership is to do with taking forward a sense of agency and responsibility for a better future for all pupils, regardless of their circumstances. Social justice involves political action to improve society (Mestry, 2014). It cannot be left to a few formal leaders in a school but needs to permeate the culture of a school within which teachers consider themselves activists, as *'Teachers can be agents of change or they can be guardians of the status quo'* (Arshad, 2012: 4). Social justice leadership needs to be positioned in school organisations, with teacher leadership *'at the intersection of social justice and curriculum inquiry acted on in teachers' classrooms'* (Lopez, 2014: 478). Lopez argues:

> *teacher leadership represents the agency of teachers to disrupt existing norms and as social justice represents the pursuit of more equitable schooling,*

> *moving away from what I refer to as laminated equity and policies. ... seek[ing] to implement social change, remove injustices and improve the lives and experiences of students.*

Lopez (2014: 480) proposes *'a cadre of aspiring school administrators'* will ensue, *'who understand how to meet the needs of diverse learners and ease the conundrum of retraining and training current school leaders and administrators who do not bring these experiences'*. This is not to negate the role of headteachers in hierarchical school structures who, *'retain[ing] overall power and influence and the strategic control over the direction of school improvement as well as providing legitimisation to staff leadership'* (Torrance, 2013: 368).

In What Ways Is 'Women In Educational Leadership' A Social Justice Issue?

A concern with women in educational leadership represents a social justice perspective in a number of ways. At a basic level, social justice represents a fundamental commitment to issues of equality (Dukes and Ming, 2014). Not only are women underrepresented in senior leadership but the discussion of gender in educational leadership is rare since it, '*does not seem to be considered an essential component of the discussion and classification of leadership theory in education'* (Coleman, 2003: 326). That said, the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions 'has a well developed body of literature that explores different notions of social justice over time informed by liberal, radical, cultural and post structural feminisms' (Blackmore, 2009b: 4). Women still experience barriers into headship (Coleman, 2005). Despite a much higher proportion of teachers internationally being women than men, they hold a minority of secondary school management positions

and in primary schools, males hold an over representative proportion of management positions (Coleman, 2002; 2005). Exploring why the potential for women to become 'the new source of talent for leadership positions' did not progress further beyond the turn of the millennium (Blackmore, 2009b: 3), remains an equality issue. Coleman (2002) identified different pressures which female headteachers face in maintaining work-life-balance, making career choices and choice of leadership style to conclude 'women experience headship differently' (Coleman, 2002: 325). Of those women who do take up headships in English secondary schools, they are 'more likely to be single, separated or divorced; fulfill domestic responsibilities; move location to follow their partner's career; have fewer children; and draw on a wide range of carers to look after sick children than men' (Fuller, 2010: 376). Women constantly negotiate their coexisting roles as professional and mother (Bradbury and Gunter, 2006).

Traditionally, women 'are culturally expected to be caring, subjective and personal' (Oplatka, 2001: 231) whilst working within 'a male-dominated organisational culture' (230) within which 'orthodox leadership is male' (Coleman, 2003: 325). The pervading presence of gender stereotyping of leadership styles is based on socially constructed gendered norms (Hoff and Mitchell, 2008; Schmuck, 1996). These norms frequently position men as natural candidates for leadership and marginalize women's ways of leading to exclude them from leadership (Blackmore, 2002; Court, 1994; Shakeshaft, 1987). The equation of leadership with masculinity is not new (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1998; Kezar and Moriarty, 2000). Yoder (2001) draws our attention to the influence gender can have on leadership opportunities for women; when issues of gender are left unchallenged major limitations to encouraging young women into leadership can occur. Kezar and Moriarty (2000: 55) indicate:

Traditional models of leadership tend to be exclusive and represent an orientation to leadership derived from those traditionally in positions of power that is mostly Caucasian, male, upper-middle-class orientation to leadership.

That said, Coleman (2003; 2005) found that there were no significant differences in female and male headteachers' descriptions of their leadership style or perceptions of their daily leadership practice. Whether men and women leaders behave differently in leadership is a highly debated topic (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Eagly and Johnson's (1990) meta-analysis of over 350 gender comparison studies in the area of leadership found no differences in styles for men and women leaders in formal leadership positions. As such, it would be contentious to refer to female or male perspectives on and styles of leadership, since feminine and masculine styles can be enacted by both male and female headteachers. Indeed, as outlined above, research on gender in educational leadership styles has had an increasing emphasis on androgyny (Pace and Pace, 2005). In researching women leaders as if they are a homogenous group, some of the literature that explores women secondary headteachers 'is predicated on outmoded theories of gender' (Fuller, 2010: 363) since 'Gendered leadership is more fluid and shifting than some research into differences between the sexes might suggest' (ibid.: 369). Indeed, Blackmore (2009a: 57) argues that 'the process of popularization of women's ways of leading discourse treats women as a homogeneous group without differences in race/class/gender or in beliefs', and does not necessarily consider the diverse contexts in which women lead. It is timely that Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) synthesize the significant number of leadership studies related to ways in which women lead to highlight five key ways that women show

their contextual approach to leadership – relational leadership, leadership for social justice, leadership for learning, spiritual leadership and balanced leadership.

In a sense, it is not surprising to find that women, who may or may not have experienced gender inequalities in the family, education and the workplace, choose to lead in such ways. Over the last decade, many researchers have reported that women tend to focus more on relationships and participation, sharing power and responsibility and deconstructing hierarchies, emphasizing reciprocity and conceptualizing leadership as collective rather than individualistic (Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Blackmore, 1989; Court, 2003; Kezar and Moriarty, 2000, McNae, 2010; 2014). With women, there is often an emphasis on the need to empower and care for others, and work in consultation and collaboration with consensus (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

We still know very little about women in educational leadership as a social justice issue within any individual country's context and far less across countries and continents. This study set out to explore the feasibility and utility of such research, recognizing that, *'The challenge for any transnational dialogue is understanding the new global terrain beyond national borders'* (Blackmore, 2009b: 4). There is much to be explored since, as Fuller (2010) notes, schools are contexts that expose children and young people to gendered representations beyond the family context. The school is a context which can, in its actions and inactions, perpetuate gender inequities or seek to dispel them. There is a misconception of schools as 'feminised' workplaces. The majority of teaching staff may be women but men are over-represented in headship posts. The construction of schools as 'feminised' perpetuates the

misapprehension that women's dominance in the workforce leads to opportunities for promotion should they choose to achieve senior posts. Thus, children and young people encounter a women-dominated workforce that is disproportionately managed and led by men that seemingly also goes largely unquestioned.

By exploring women's experiences across different contexts, it may be possible to illuminate some of the experiences which inform the ways in which women perceive their leadership, and also their contribution to leading in socially just ways.

Methods and Sample

This study draws from four countries, loosely connected by being part of The Commonwealth; a group of 53 countries that span Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Americas, Europe and the Pacific. Case studies conducted in Scotland, England, Jamaica and New Zealand provide contrasting, cross-national contexts to explore the influences, possibilities and challenges that women school leaders experience. The researchers are mindful that *'educational administration and leadership are primarily a Western concept'* (Bogotch and Shields, 2014: 8) and that *'assumptions of Western, liberal democracies which tend to underlie many of the theoretical conceptions/definitions of social justice need to be recontextualized and then reconceptualized'* (Bogotch, 2014: 61). Moreover, in this study, the Jamaican context provides a contrast to the majority of international studies available into women in educational leadership. Caribbean society is matriarchal with a high proportion of both women teachers and headteachers although beyond the school level, it is argued that men still hold significant power and influence (Miller, 2013).

This international project is exploratory and develops as understandings become clearer. As a small-scale multi-method investigation it combines documentary analysis of policy documents and related research literature with semi-structured interviews. It aims to contribute to the limited comparative empirical evidence available on women in school leadership, within the context of a broader policy environment nationally and internationally. It seeks to make a modest contribution to knowledge in this area.

Each research team adopted purposive sampling of women headteachers. Many were known to the researchers and selected on the basis of their ability to critically reflect and articulate their experiences. There were headteacher/principals in a variety of schools as nursery (one), infant (two), primary (eight), intermediate (one), and secondary (four) schools. It is intended that their engagement will contribute to their professional development and assist them in clarifying their own thinking about their role as women school leaders. Participants are conceptualised as co-creators of the data. An in-depth approach was favoured, to gather narrative accounts of life story events as *'a way of recognizing and capturing others' sense of social justice ... critiquing and reflecting upon the taken for granted assumptions'* (Taysum and Gunter, 2008: 190). This narrative approach was utilised as *'a critical method in the struggle for social justice'* (Muzaliwa and Gardiner, 2014: 194). The interviews were guided by six overarching questions, the first two drawn from more heavily for this chapter:

1. What motivates women to become headteachers?
2. Do women benefit from any supports or encounter any barriers en route to

headship?

3. Do women perceive that they experience headship in the same or different ways from men and if so, in what ways?
4. Do women perceive that they enact leadership in the same or different ways from men and if so, in what ways?
5. Does educational policy contribute in any way to supporting or promoting women in school leadership?
6. How do the research findings contribute to developing understandings of women in school leadership to potentially inform a larger scale research project?

Procedures For The Recruitment And Selection Of Principals/Headteachers

Across the four countries, there exist key differences in the procedures used for the recruitment and selection of principals/headteachers. In Scotland, the 32 Local Authorities are responsible for this process with the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 ensuring procedures include parental involvement. From 2018/19, the Scottish Government intends that all new headteachers will have completed a postgraduate qualification for headship.

In England, headteachers are selected by school governing bodies. From 2010, the further academization of schools removed many schools from local authority control. Local authorities are not represented in the selection process. From 2012, the National Professional Qualification for Headship is no longer mandatory. The responsibility for selecting, training, preparing and developing teachers and school leaders has been

devolved to Teaching School Alliances in a shift away from Higher Education Institutions.

In Jamaica, the recruitment and selection of headteachers/principals is governed by the Education Act of 1980, section 43. Each School Board, acting in support with the Ministry of Education, is responsible for the recruitment and selection of principals. For appointment as a principal, the individual must possess at least a first degree, be teacher trained with at least three years approved service as a trained teacher.

The governance responsibilities and decision-making processes of New Zealand schools are devolved to school Principals and individual school boards of trustees. These boards comprise elected or co-opted community members and parents, and one member of the school staff. The process of headteacher/principal appointments is highly localized and there is a high level of autonomy overall with *'no accountability required at any level of central government in the appointment process'* (Brooking, 2003: 2), as no officials from the New Zealand Ministry of Education are involved in the process.

The Sixteen Headteachers Involved In This Study

A small number of women headteachers in each country contributed to the first phase of this study (see Table 1). In Scotland, four headteachers participated with varying years of experience and number of headship posts to date. All four headteachers were born in Scotland: three were white British; one was British Asian. All four Scottish headteachers had children, three were married and one was divorced but living with a long term partner. Their ages ranged from late thirties to late fifties. In England, the

headteachers reflected the multi-ethnic urban population. However, there are so few Black and Global Majority heritage women in headship in England that their countries of origin and/or faith are omitted for purposes of anonymity. In Jamaica, the four headteachers had taught in primary schools and had over 10 years of classroom teaching experience. At the time of the study all four teachers were serving as headteachers in the primary school where they were first appointed as teachers. The participants' ages ranged from early thirties to mid-fifties. In New Zealand, the length of service and leadership experience varied amongst the four headteachers. Two headteachers who led inner city primary schools were experienced teachers (11 and 15 years in their schools) and both relatively new to leadership. The ages for this group ranged from mid-thirties to mid-fifties.

Table 1 - Headteachers Involved In This Study

Country	**Name**	**School**	**Time in post**	**Personal details**
Scotland	Alison	Middle-sized infant school Rural town	4 years 3rd permanent headship	Born in Scotland Has children
	Louise	Large primary school Suburban area of city	2 years 1st permanent headship	Born in Scotland Has children
	Ann	Large secondary school Outer edges of city	1 year 2nd permanent headship	Born in Scotland Has children
	Claire	Large secondary	9 years 1st permanent	Born in Scotland

		school Within a city	headship	Has children
England	Susannah	Nursery school Urban setting	4 years	White British Married with children Mid-50s
	Hasna	Primary school Urban setting	1 year	First generation immigrant Married with children Mid-40s
	Dee	Secondary school Urban setting	2 years	British Asian Married with children Mid-40s
	Coleen	Secondary school Urban setting	12 years	Mixed heritage - British and faith Married with children Mid-50s
Jamaica	Gene	Primary school Inner city	12 years	Born in Jamaica Unmarried
	Sherett	Primary school Rural multi-grade school	1 year	Born in Jamaica Married with children
	Kemma	Middle sized primary	5 years	Born in Jamaica

		school Urban		Unmarried
	Smerl	Middle-sized primary school Rural	8 years	Born in Jamaica Unmarried
New Zealand	Maya	Primary school Rural	5 years	Born in New Zealand
	Kathy	Large primary school Urban	2 years	Born in New Zealand
	Sarah	Intermediate school Inner city	6 years	Born in New Zealand
	Aroha	Large high school	10 years	Born in New Zealand Of Maori decent (indigenous New Zealander)

Emerging Themes from the Data

The purpose was to investigate women's experiences and perceptions of leadership, locating these within a framework of leading for social justice. Common themes emerged across the Commonwealth countries, with a small number of contextual differences appearing. These common themes are presented in Table 2, along with an indication of which women leaders in each country raised each theme. Where all four of the women raised a theme, this is indicated by 'All'. Where fewer than four women

raised a theme, the names of those who did so are presented in the table.

Table 2: Overview Of Women Leaders Who Raised Each Theme

	Scotland	England	Jamaica	New Zealand
Limited early career aspirations (linked to gender)	All	Susannah Hasna Dee	Gene Kemma Sherett	Maya Sarah Aroha
Pragmatic/altruistic reasons for seeking promotion	All	Hasna Dee	All	Kathy Aroha
Experience of discrimination	All	All	Gene Kemma Sherett	All
General sources of support	All	All	All	All
Specific support from husband and/or family	All	All	Sherett	Maya
Experience of personal challenges	All	All	All	All
Experience of wider challenges	All	Susannah Hasna Dee	Kemma Sherett	Sarah Aroha
Perceived differences between men and women's leadership styles	All	Susannah Dee Coleen	Gene Kemma	All
Perceived importance of national support and policy	All	All	None	Sarah
Suggestions for future research	All	Coleen	All	Sarah Aroha

The following four themes are highlighted to begin a conversation about women headteachers' similar and contrasting experiences of school leadership in Scotland, England, Jamaica and New Zealand:

- Limited career aspirations in early career phase (linked to gender)
- Experiences of discrimination (age; gender; ethnicity)
- Experiences of personal challenges
- Experiences of wider challenges

Limited Career Aspirations In Early Career Phase (Linked To Gender)

All four of the Scottish headteachers reported having limited career aspirations in the early phase of their careers, with none planning a career towards headship:

> "it was never really on my radar at all. … it kind of made its way towards me." [Ann]

Similarly, three of the four English headteachers reported having limited career aspirations. Three started their working lives in other jobs with the fourth not immediately attracted to teaching:

> "No plan whatsoever at the beginning and I'd say even to maybe two years ago, still not thinking about headship at all." [Dee]

In contrast, Coleen recounted:

> "I've had my children. Gone straight back to work because I was absolutely driven about being a Head."

Three of the four Jamaican headteachers reported having limited career aspirations:

> "No, not in my wildest dreams." [Gene]

> "It was the furthest thing from my mind." [Kemma]

In contrast, Smerl had "always wanted to become an education officer" and considered her headteacher role as "preparation" for that.

Three of the New Zealand headteachers reported having limited career aspirations:

> "I just did not know what was possible…what was out there for me" [Maya]

"The way forward was not always clear and I had time out. I think I had a different perspective to most, because for me, family always came first" [Sarah]

"I went into teaching to make a difference and did not really picture myself as one [a principal]. It was not until someone said to me that I should consider it [headship] that I thought seriously about it and actively pursued it" [Aroha]

However, Kathy had aspirations from the beginning of her teaching career and stated:

"I knew that was me…I wanted to leave a legacy right from when I was at uni…the way I could do this was through having my own school, being the decision maker…I've always been at the front, leading and making decisions from when I was a student" [Kathy]

Experience of discrimination

All four of the Scottish headteachers reported experiences of discrimination. Alison in her mid-30s and Louise at age 27 experienced age discrimination on applying for a first promoted post:

"I saw that as quite a barrier, that I'd left it too late. And people were thinking I was too old to be a senior teacher. … people thought at school, that I was too old to start, to start the journey to become a school leader." [Alison]

Whereas Ann and Claire experienced discrimination returning to work after their first children were born:

"I think one of the biggest challenges for me if I go right back was when I decided to have children. And I remember at one point coming back from my first maternity leave and discussing things with the headteacher. And he said to

me at that point, 'I don't know why you're coming back to work. The most important thing that you have and is a challenge is bringing up your child. And what are you doing coming back to work?' And that shocked me a bit really… So that was a challenge but, you know, I knew within myself my family was important to me but so was my career. And I just rose above that and thought, 'I won't have his value system imposed upon me'." [Claire]

All four English headteachers raised examples of different types of discrimination. Susannah was not perceived as having leadership potential whilst Hasna had felt patronised. Hasna and Dee had experienced discrimination related to race, culture and/or religion. References were made to:

"'Your community', and, 'In your area', and, 'The risks to your children', you know, I was fuming inside but I had to control it and I had to be professional about it, but it was a personal attack [on me as a Muslim]." [Hasna]

Coleen experienced discrimination directly related to being a working mother:

"when I had my last child, when I came back from maternity leave my Head said to me, 'Oh you won't need to attend those meetings now because you've got your little one to look after. So don't worry about it.' Then I went away to my line manager and blew my top because I was so cross that she thought that because I'd had a child, I couldn't carry on operating at the level I had before." [Coleen]

Three of the Jamaican headteachers identified examples of age and/or gender discrimination. Gene raised a highly political example:

> "The Chairman of the School Board at the time wanted a male even though I did very well at the interview. I came out on top of all the interviewees but he was adamant he wanted a male while the other members of the board did not agree with him and so the MOE [Minister of Education] and the Member of Parliament had to step in and that is how they overrode his decision and I got the job. But I think he wanted a male as he felt it was a male who could bring strong leadership to the school." [Gene]

All of the women in New Zealand had experienced discrimination in various forms. Kathy shared an example of age discrimination:

> "…and they looked at me and one asked, 'what life experiences could you possibly have in the relatively short life you have lived so far?' I could not believe they would ask a question like that. It really rocked me, I was gobsmacked and I felt like a child, having to justify my 'short existence' and lack of time teaching, although I knew I had the stuff to do the job".

Sarah and Maya shared instances of gender discrimination with Sarah venting her frustration with the number of inexperienced young male teachers being appointed to leadership roles ahead of other more experienced and qualified women who had applied:

> "You see them come in, lap top under one arm, rugby ball under the other and you know the story…you just know…they are going to get it over you. Some people are like, 'we can't see why you did not get it'. But I know – it's that the

> Boards can't see past the penis, the man and what they think he's going to bring to the school. They [board of trustees] just assume he will be stronger, firmer, better role model for boys…you name it, they will spin any line to disguise their traditions and unfair and often wrong choices".

Aroha shared an interesting example of positive discrimination. She had been appointed to a role because "they needed my brown face". She described winning a position in a school with a high proportion of Maori students. The school had become alienated from its community and the board of trustees was looking for a leader to make reconnections. Aroha came from Maori lineage, highly respected in the area, and although relatively inexperienced in the area of formal educational leadership, she believed she had won the position over more experienced applicants because of her skin colour "but they would never say that out loud". Aroha also experienced discrimination, often feeling "excluded and on the outer" at Principals' conferences and events because she was a woman and more so because she was a Maori woman. She stated:

> "I stand there invisible mainly. They ignore me. I'm not invited onto committees. I don't drink, I don't play golf…so I don't really fit the mould and because of this I guess I miss out. I feel alone and mostly just stay in my room".

Personal Challenges Experienced

All four of the Scottish headteachers reported the personal challenges linked to work-life balance as working mothers:

> "That's been my big barrier all the way through." [Ann]

> "So there's always a constant pressure. And I think it's all about being, being the best mum you can be as well as being the best head you can be" [Claire]

All four of the English headteachers reported having experienced similar challenges:

> "being able to spend quality time with my family in the evenings and the weekends. Now that's not physically possible." [Coleen]

Dee, however, saw an advantage to this challenge:

> "one of the things that has really helped me get the work-life balance was having children because you have limited time to do work." [Dee]

Maintaining a work-life balance as a working mother/carer was a challenge highlighted by the Jamaican headteacher who was a mother/carer while the others perceived it as a challenge for working mothers:

> "The home gets neglected; children suffer everybody else suffer." [Gene]

> "Definitely! ...and work takes the bigger share" [Smerl]

> "Women school leaders face many challenges in maintaining a work and personal life balance. Women, are most times the person who have to ensure that the children are taken care of, the house is clean, the husband is taken care of, do grocery shopping, take the sick children to the doctor and be a good leader, mother and wife. Some female school leaders are also single parent and this poses a problem in terms of spending enough quality time with their children/child." [Sherett]

All of the participants from New Zealand experienced personal challenges associated with their leadership. Maya had returned to work having experienced fatigue and what she considered 'burn out':

> "You try to be everything to everyone and still it is not enough…people want more from you and my tank was empty. I had nothing left to give to anyone – my kids, my family, my job. My mind and body simply gave out."

Sarah explained a large number of challenges included the assumptions made by others:

> "I was like the default – it was assumed that I would do kids, sports, dinner, washing – you name it! [Husband] and I had some big chats about how this was not fair and needed to change. He was like 'sure', then after a week or two it slipped back into the old ways…I guess I am not good at letting go…good at leading at school, not so much at home!"

Kathy shared:

> "They [staff] set you up against others. I remember the first run in I had ...some of the male staff just thought they could walk all over me. Maybe because I was new, but more likely because I was a woman…not part of the old boys club. It was a hard culture to break…and not easy to lead a team of males who don't want to play nicely".

Kathy had found it difficult to find a partner due to the long hours she worked; she felt "wedded to the job", with little hope of finding a partner to share her life with.

Experience of Wider Challenges

All four of the Scottish headteachers reported having experienced a range of wider challenges associated with being a woman headteacher:

> "So I think probably I have got myself into a number of situations which I'd have preferred not to have been in [with line managers in local authority]. Not through trying to cause trouble, but trying to do what's right." [Louise]

> "It's probably not a deliberate decision to try and make an old boy's network. But I think what had happened in school leadership is a lot of the promoted posts were held by men. And as a result, you know, I suppose they did activities together which were kind of suitable for men ... And that created a mesh network in leadership which was particularly exclusive for a female leader unless you're into these particular areas [laughs]. So I think without really thinking about it they had created a network which was exclusive." [Ann]

Three of the four English headteachers provided examples of wider challenges. Susannah reflected on previous experience of organizational culture within Further Education, which she found was male-dominated and no encouragement for her to lead or recognition of her potential. By contrast, Coleen was in danger of perpetuating a culture that might disadvantage other mothers:

> "I guess that's about me believing that everybody should operate at my level and that's a weakness of mine I think." [Coleen]

Two of the four Jamaican headteachers reflected on wider challenges associated with being a woman headteacher:

> "I encountered information withholding, things I should be told I was not told and also some teachers were not too cooperative. For example one teacher who

was the signatory to the bank account for the school failed to turn up at the end of one term to sign cheques even though arrangements were made for her to sign some cheques and she did not respond to calls and text messages I sent to her." [Sherett J]

Two of the New Zealand women had experienced wider challenges. Sarah shared:

> "For me it was breaking traditions and rituals what seemed like such normal practice, but until questioned, were not even considered to be damaging, to the school, the staff, the students and to me. They [rituals] created a culture of sexism and judgment which no one deserved to be on the receiving end of".

Aroha expressed the challenges of leading in her school context, and the tensions of stepping back in her family and cultural context where women leaders were not seen 'at the front'. She described how it was difficult to embody leadership in its full sense when the cultural protocol and expectations had a significant impact on her leadership outside the school creating a tension with her leadership in school. One example was when she felt she should speak on the school Marae (cultural meeting place), but cultural protocol prevented women from doing so. This impacted on how others saw her as a leader and how "walking in two worlds" was confusing and lacked authenticity.

Discussion

This chapter began with a discussion of social justice representing a major theme within leadership policy, research and literature internationally before identifying

women in educational leadership as a social justice issue. A preliminary analysis of data gathered across four contrasting Commonwealth countries supports this view. Although there were differences in the experiences of women headteachers within and across the countries, there were more similarities. Almost all of these women said they experienced headship differently from male headteachers and had been treated differently in their careers. Many examples of discrimination and additional challenges were identified. We might have hoped our findings would contrast Coleman's from twenty years ago (2002) and Bradbury and Gunter (2006) with regard to negotiating coexisting roles as professional and mother. Instead, these findings point to entrenched social and cultural traditions that prescribe gender roles and *'spill over to influence leadership behaviour in organisations'* (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001: 787).

Despite decades of legislation and various initiatives such as mentoring, capacity building programmes aimed at assisting women into leadership, it would appear that gender still has a significant impact on leadership opportunities for women. Left unchallenged, this could create significant limitations to encouraging young women into leadership opportunities (Yoder, 2001).

In overcoming challenges, and in many cases issues of power and inequality (Shields and Mohan, 2008), these headteachers had prevailed. In the main, their early career aspirations were limited, they often took up headship for pragmatic or altruistic reasons rather than seeking status or power. This reflects Curry's (2000) assertion that through socialization, many women come to believe that leadership is unacceptable for their gender. Certainly, there were examples of these women headteachers

encountering organizational cultures that significantly impacted on them (Walker and Dimmock, 2002) for example, as young leaders and when returning to leadership positions from maternity leave.

Conclusion

Social justice leadership represents a major theme within policy, research and literature. As part of this, the resurgence of interest into the experiences and perceptions of women in educational leadership (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011; McNamara et al., 2008; Reynolds, 2002) demonstrates internationally women remain underrepresented in school leadership. Reasons vary from one country to another however, it has been suggested from previous empirical studies (Bradbury and Gunter, 2006; Coleman, 2002; 2003; 2005; Oplatka, 2001) that family and personal roles, social, cultural, orthodox stereotypes as well as systemic and policy-based actions all contribute.

Through participating in this study, the headteachers were encouraged to reflect on their experiences. Reflection is an important part of developing a conscience of social justice and Whyte (2001: 157) advocates for more focused reflection suggesting *'we must go to the roots of our abilities, a journey into the core sense of ourselves where we can put together an understanding of how we are made, why we have the responsibilities we have, and, just as important, the images that formed us in our growing*'. Indeed, one important facet of educational leaders leading in socially just ways is to ensure they critically reflect, and understand how their *'underlying beliefs, values, and attitudes may be counterproductive in our quest for education that is both*

just and excellent' (Shields, 2004: 8).

As researchers, like Slater, Potter, Torres and Briceno (2014: 114), we have been struck by the similarities between diverse countries, in the experiences of the sixteen headteachers, reflecting the conclusions of Norberg, Arlestig and Angelle (2014: 101) that *'social justice leadership in practice, despite the national context, offers more commonalities than differences'*. Indeed, the emerging findings from this study reflect the view of Bogotch (2014: 62) that '*Social justice as an educational practice is inclusive of all members of the world's population regardless of governmental structures, cultures, or ideologies, and it accounts for innumerable contingencies of life-influencing individual outcomes or unpredictable consequences of our actions*.'

We have gained much from considerations of local manifestations of global issues, moved individually and collectively to leadership commitments that emphasize social justice (Lyman, Strachan and Lazaridou, 2012). However, as Shields (2004: 8) argues, *'commitment and good intentions are not enough*'. It is hoped these case studies provide potential for cross-phase comparison (primary and secondary contexts) as well as cross-national comparison of contexts, influences, possibilities and challenges. In addition, the study wishes to explore the intersection of gender with characteristics such as ethnicity/'race' and age to consider how these impact on the shape and realities of women's leadership in the twenty first century.

The vast majority of women headteachers in this study experienced discrimination, personal challenges and wider challenges during their journey into headship and on appointment to headship. 'Women in educational leadership' is a social justice issue.

If the underrepresentation of women in school leadership is to be addressed then this reality needs to be faced, further explored and acted upon both nationally and internationally.

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